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Why We March: Eric Esteves of the Lenny Zakim Fund

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Eric Esteves, the executive director of the Lenny Zakim Fund and the founder of Hella Black Trivia, participated in three protests to stand up against police brutality and the injustices towards Black people. He went alone to the first one, then his teenage son and his niece joined him in the other protests.

Esteves, 40, recently spoke to Shafaq Patel from the Boston Business Journal about why he feels it's a necessity for him to protest and how he's tired of the symbolic statements without policy change.

"I participate in the protests because, for me, it's an unfortunate necessity. I've been participating in protests over the years many times, and more recently, I feel like there is a groundswell of pain, and I know there's a lot of people who are tired of the same thing happening. But I also see the possibility of a groundswell of change happening because I feel like there's a lot more people realizing things need to change in certain directions. And we're starting to see some of that happen around the country where policies are being changed and people are listening to people who are saying defund the police, and what that means about reinvesting funds elsewhere.

"There's a lot of statements and a lot of kneeling going on but we don't want symbolic gestures or tags or the statement kneeling without substance. It has to be paired with actual policy change and actual law and ordinances. So when it comes to police brutality, there's certification in other states, but not in Massachusetts yet. (Editor's note: This interview was conducted before Gov. Charlie Baker filed a police reform bill on Wednesday that would create a certification program for police)

"I think there's a whole wide range of issues that people are marching for and what compels them. A lot of people don't feel compelled to get involved in a movement until it affects them personally. But for so many people, even if it's not affecting them personally, their entire world and everyone they're connected to is impacted — seeing them shed their pain online or in person. And I think it's resonating with a lot of people who otherwise are disconnected from these lived realities.

"For me, right now, to be Black in Boston is a challenge. I know people who feel like Boston is the most racist place in the country, and I know people who don't agree with that. But yet, there's still a lot of power, authority, and influence amongst Boston's Black community that is lacking. It's not a monolithic community. There's still a lot of talent here, but that talent hasn't been allowed to fully flourish. Similar to what I said about kneeling and



GARY HIGGINS

Eric Esteves is executive director of the Lenny Zakim Fund.

statements, there's been symbolic gestures over time but there still isn't parity in terms of our population and our power.

"I'm an executive director of Black males running an organization, one of maybe four Black people running a grant-running organization. There's very few corporate leaders of color...There's certainly a long way to go from here.

"I am someone who's always been a part of organized movements and activism. So for me, protesting is an effective way of always keeping the constant pressure and attention to injustice.

"People are literally protesting in the midst of a pandemic. We are to be socially distancing, yet, this is so critically important. These are some of the largest protests and marches and demonstrations we've ever seen, because it's literally that important. We're risking our lives because we've been risking our lives."